

## [Robert Verdon]

White Pioneer

Claudia Harris P.W.

Amarillo, Texas [??]

District #16 PANHANDLE PIONEERS

Related by Mr. Robert Verdon

[208 1/2?] Folk Street

Amarillo, Texas

Mr. Verdon was reared beside the banks of the river Lee, a tributary of the Thames, where he often played as a child with Evangeline Booth. Later in life he emigrated to the United States, locating in North Dakota, where he prospered. However, he was not satisfied in the cold northern state. His unrest was increased by tales told by men coming into the region for the purpose of selling land in the Panhandle of Texas, the last frontier of the country. According to these glowing reports, the Panhandle was a fine place to invest and get a new start in life. Land was cheap. Amarillo was a big, lively town. The climate was all that could be wished.

On the Fourth of July, 1908, Mr. Verdon arrived with his family in Amarillo. Unbelievably, there were no fireworks, no brass bands. There were only a few people in the town, and fewer houses.

Once settled, Mr. Verdon purchased the Mason Hotel from Mrs. Mason, who had built the hostelry, which stood near the Denver station in the old Bowery district of the new town.

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Mr. Verdon's daughter, now Mrs. Shaeffer, who later taught in the Amarillo public schools, received her doctor's degree in England.

Mr. Verdon recalls that in the early days of Amarillo when there was a bad blizzard, in the evening after work hours, an old gentleman would ride around in a buggy to the three or four hotels which the town boasted and tell the proprietors that they were to / turn no one away who came to them for shelter at night during the "spell" of inclement weather. The bills for such service to those who could not pay were to be sent to him. This man was W. H. [Fuqua?], for years a financial power in Amarillo. Mr. Fuqua who worked hard and saved his money, had no sympathy for the shiftless no'er-do-well who made no effort to help 2 himself. To those who tried, but failed, he was lenient and kind, always willing to lend a helping hand. Many a rancher, beaten by the drouth, with his cattle mortgaged, was given a new lease on life by Mr. Fuqua, who refused to take the mortgaged animals, often lending a further sum to help the unfortunate mortgagee to build his fortunes anew. But the person who did not try to help himself did not need to come to the astute banker, who was the first to 'clamp down" on all such offenders. Mr. Fuqua also quietly and unostentatiously helped many a poor, hard-working man of Amarillo to get a foothold on the ladder of success.

Mr. Fuqua often told the night officers of Amarillo not to let the stranger in the gates sleep in a cold box car, but to send him to an hotel for shelter and food, sending the bill to him. He also saw to it that no one who was unable to buy coal should suffer for lack of a fire. Coal was furnished during the winter at his expense to all families unable to pay for fuel themselves. ( Mrs. Fuqua, like her husband, was renowned for her kindness to the less fortunate. Many of the early settlers in Amarillo recall her visits to the sick, the poor, and the needy).

Mr. Verdon remembers the Cornelius twins as the first white girls born in Amarillo. The Cornelius family lived on the corner of Fourth and Fillmore, opposite the present site of Cal Marley's filling station, on lots given then by [W?]. B. [Sanborn?] for moving to the new

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location of Amarillo. The first baby boy born in Amarillo and Potter County, Mr. Verdon recalls, was Duncan Kersey, the son of Jeff Kersey, a dispatcher for the Denver railroad.

Mr. Verdon, as the keeper of a hostelry himself, had occasion to be familiar with many interesting experiences. Among these reminiscences is one of an old Indian, known as Chief Pie Face, who came to the McIntosh Hotel to get a room one night. The clerk of the hotel, evidently adversely impressed by the old Indian's appearance, refused to let him have a room. Chief Pie Face waxed furious and, waving his arms wildly, stamped out of the Hostelry, yelling, "We buy your hotel! We buy your hotel!" And he could have made good his word; for Mr. Verdon says that the Indian was a wealthy man. However, Chief Pie Face was not left out in the cold, laterally or figuratively; for someone told him of an Englishman (Mr. Verdon) who had a hotel where he could obtain comfortable quarters.

Mr. Verdon, a most modest gentleman, has more than two dozen / medals which he received for saving the lives of others. One day, shortly after his marriage when he was walking along the banks of the Lee, he heard a splash in the river. Looking around, he saw a man disappearing for the last time in the water. Without stopping to think of the danger to himself, he jumped into the water. The young man whom he was trying to save, got a strangle [grip?] [o?] his rescuer's neck and it was necessary to knock him unconscious before he could be rescued. Mr. Verdon in some way got the man to the river bank and by means of artificial respiration brought him back to life. England has strict laws against suicides, as well as murderers. There one who attempts suicide and fails may be tried for murder if the affair is brought to the notice of the authorities. Needless to say, Mr. Verdon did not report the matter of the young man and the river to officers of the law.

Two weeks later a young man appeared at the Verdon door to thank Mr. Verdon for saving his life. "But you have the wrong person. I did not save your life", he denied the charge, failing to recognize the man, whose hair had turned snow-white in the short time which had elapsed since the attempted suicide. Whether shock or the worry caused by fear of the trail as a murdered caused the phenomenon or not, Mr. Verdon could not say, but he

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vouches for its truth. He has been asked to give the story over the air on the "Believe it or Not" hour of Robert Ripley. At some time in the near future, he plans to re-enact the episode for Ripley.

On another occasion, Mr. Verdon was on his way to the market place to buy a Christmas turkey (on December 23, to be exact). Hearing some one scream that a man was drowning, he ran to see if he could be of any assistance. The weather being cold and foggy, he was burdened with a heavy topcoat, which he pulled off as he ran. He plunged into the chilly water, but he was too late. When he pulled the man from the river, he could revive him.